Curriculum & Instruction Review

School Improvement

Building a More Effective Learning Environment

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School Improvement

Building a More Effective Learning Environment

Minister's Advisory Committee
Curriculum and Instruction Review
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School improvement scenarios in Chapter Two are fictitious.

Summary of Curriculum and Instruction Review Reports

The Minister's Advisory Committee on Curriculum and Instruction collected a large amount of information on educational issues. In addition to its final report, **Directions**, the Committee prepared five booklets which contain background information. These are described briefly below.

DIRECTIONS: The Curriculum and Instruction Review was initiated as a means of assessing educational needs in Saskatchewan and proposing improvements to the education system. **Directions**, the final report, presents the major concerns, the Committee's response to those concerns, and the Committee's recommendations for educational improvement.

WHAT THEY SAID: The Curriculum and Instruction Review sought public opinion on education by distributing a questionnaire, holding public meetings around the province, and asking for the submission of briefs. **What They Said** presents the educational views of those people who responded to the Committee's requests.

SASKATCHEWAN EDUCATION: The Curriculum and Instruction Review proposed a number of changes that will affect the Department of Education. **Saskatchewan Education** outlines those changes and examines the role and responsibility of the Department in implementing the recommendations of the Review.

SASKATCHEWAN CHILDREN: The success of an education system is largely dependent upon its ability to respond to the needs of its students. **Saskatchewan Children** explores the educational needs of children and the unique characteristics of children in this province.

TOWARD THE YEAR 2000: Technological and social changes of the future will undoubtedly affect life on this planet. **Toward the Year 2000** examines the predictions of futurists as to how education should change in order to better prepare students for the future.

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT: A school's environment has a profound effect on both the productivity and satisfaction of its students. **School Improvement** examines the effect of school environment on learning, and explores ways of building more effective learning environments in Saskatchewan schools.

Improving Schools from the Inside

The concept of school improvement is not new. The history of education documents numerous attempts to improve education. From the time public schools were first established, they have been challenged about their practices, their content, and their ideas.

The education system has seen many reform movements, and a variety of philosophies and approaches have been advocated. Curricula have been continuously revised to keep pace with the increasing amount of information that is available. The responsibilities of the school have expanded. New courses have been developed. New materials and practices have been implemented.

The major push for change has come from outside the school. Many of the proposed changes have been mandated, legislated, or imposed upon the school in some fashion. In other words, educators have been told what to do. Expectations have been stated, often without the resources or support necessary to change practices. Some have impacted the system and some have simply been passing fads.

Schools are once again being challenged. The major difference this time is that more is known about how schools actually change.

A New Concept of School Improvement

Change takes time and involves many people, and the school is the point at which most effective and long lasting change takes place.

The concept of school improvement has grown. It still involves putting new programs and practices into place, but now it includes guidelines for where and how change in schools takes place. Successful change is related to people and relationships, attitudes and commitment, communication and support. It has implications for procedures, decision-making, and planning processes.

Transporting a new program or practice into a school does not constitute change and improvement in education, and mandating change does not necessarily result in different or better educational practices. Change takes time and involves many people, and the school is the point at which most effective and long-lasting change takes place.

The new concept of school improvement is based on a different orientation to change. While the impetus for improvement can come from outside the school, planning and action must occur within. This concept of school improvement is based on the assumption that people in schools have the skills and abilities to improve education and to solve their own problems. School improvement is about taking action at the local level.

People in schools have the skills and abilities to improve education and to solve their own problems.

Change is a process that takes place over time. It requires that people work together to make teaching and learning more effective and their school a better place to be. Those affected by the change must become involved in problem-solving and decision-making about their school. The change begins with the initiation of a single project based on the review of current conditions. Goals setting and planning follow. Then a group of teachers implement a new practice, procedure, or program. One project leads to another. Improving and changing schools is an ongoing process.

The Substance of School Improvement

The substance of school improvement, the actual content, varies widely. Any aspect of the school can be the object of a school improvement project: the school's environment, a new curriculum, classroom management, physical facilities and equipment, teaching strategies, or administrative policies and procedures. The list is seemingly endless.

Recent research indicates that change efforts of a general nature don't appear to have much impact on educational organizations. School improvement must have a specific target focussing on a particular area of need. The most successful changes come about when the innovation introduces new teaching behaviors. Those projects which influence the ongoing life of the classroom are most likely to change and improve education.

Those affected by the change must become involved in problem-solving and decision-making about their school.

This booklet is about improvement of schools from the inside, from the perspective of teachers in their world with students. It outlines a problem-solving process that schools can work through. It offers direction to guide schools in the initiation and implementation of change projects. It reviews the implications of implementing a school-based, problem-solving approach for improving schools in Saskatchewan. And it begins with scenarios of school improvement in action.

CHAPTER 1: School Improvement Scenarios

While there is no recipe for school improvement, knowledge and experience are accumulating and some guideposts are now in place. School improvement is not the same in every school, but it is known that schools with successful change projects have a number of things in common. In all cases, people work together to enhance the educational experience for a group of students.

Schools are assuming responsibility for improvement and there are many success stories. The case studies which follow provide a picture of local initiatives and document a range of alternatives. They are presented not as models to be replicated, but as examples for study and reflection.

Austin School

There is a lot of activity at Austin School these days. The staff and students have decided to work at improving their school and they have taken on a number of projects. This all started about a year ago. There was a division institute day on problem-solving and various sessions on that topic were offered. The Austin School staff decided to work on problem-solving as school planning.

After looking at an overview on the problem-solving process, the staff went to work. The first task was to identify a problem everyone could agree to work on. Each person was asked to identify two things which would improve the school. Small groups shared ideas and then a list was made on the blackboard of all suggestions from all the groups. A priority exercise narrowed the list and helped the staff focus on a few topics.

School environment emerged as the staff's number one priority and became the goal for improvement. A brainstorming session followed on solutions for improving the learning and working climate of the school, and a long list of ideas resulted.

The next step was to organize the information and begin action planning. Ideas were sorted into four categories: facilities, procedures and planning, rewards and recognition, and inservice education. Each teacher picked a category and joined an action group. Each group set to work figuring out what could be done, when an activity would take place, who would be involved, and how projects would proceed. The small groups brought their ideas back to the large group. Modifications and adjustments were made. In the end, the Austin staff had four action plans for improving their school environment.

Several things are occurring now at Austin School. Everyone is involved in working on the school building and grounds. Groups of students and teachers are making changes in the classrooms. Murals have been painted in halls, racks have been built, areas designated for equipment and supplies. Rules have been established and everyone is working to keep the place orderly and tidy.

Equipment and scheduling procedures are being reviewed too. A consultant has been invited in to help the staff develop and establish a system for long-term planning. Staff and students are setting goals and clarifying rules on a variety of topics.

Implementation of a system of rewards and recognition was a third goal related to school environment. A bulletin board by the principal's office displays the highlights of the school environment projects. School badges have been made and a goal set to identify each person's strength and recognize individuals with the badges. There is a plan to hold two reward celebrations, one in January and one in June.

The inservice group is assessing teacher needs, exploring alternatives, and making arrangements for staff professional development related to the school environment project. This year, three school-based inservice days were used to plan and work on the project. A speaker made a presentation, films and books were reviewed, and planning sessions were held.

In Austin School, teachers and students alike are proud of their efforts. Results are beginning to show, and the process is in place for more changes to occur in the next few years.

Ann Gulka High School

The guidance counsellor at Ann Gulka High School was concerned about the number of students who were not completing grade 12. He wondered if the individualized competency-based program being used in the post-secondary institute system would work for some of the students at Ann Gulka High School.

After taking a class on competency-based education and revising a math program into modules with a math teacher in the school, Mr. Brooks presented the idea to the staff. There was quite a bit of interest and some of the staff agreed to give it a try. During the spring a few teachers worked with Mr. Brooks to revise several other programs in order to make them competency-based.

This fall an individualized program will be an option for a limited number of students at Ann Gulka High. Mr. Brooks is co-ordinating the program and teachers in different subject areas are tutoring. Some teachers not involved in tutoring are helping out by supervising classes and assuming other responsibilities for fellow teachers so they can be free to tutor. Other teachers are skeptical, but are watching to see if this project will address the drop-out problem.

David Reed Collegiate

It's 3:30 on a Wednesday afternoon. The final bell has just rung and the students are gone for another day. Groups of teachers are beginning to collect in the staff room. Various committees are getting together to work on different school improvement projects. Three such committees are on the go right now. One group of teachers is considering alternative ways of scheduling. Another group is taking on the task of improving staff communication. The third is addressing decision-making.

The staff at David Reed Collegiate went through a goal setting exercise initiated by the principal on the first day of the school year. They set out to answer the question "How can we make David Reed Collegiate a better place to work?" Individuals, small groups and, finally, the entire staff addressed the question and identified some problems. As a result, the three main concerns became goals for improvement.

Committees were formed and the teachers are working toward improving conditions in their school.

Every second Wednesday, everyone devotes time to school improvement. Some weeks the committees meet. Other weeks all staff members meet to hear committee reports, consider options, and make decisions and action plans.

This small committee-large group format was selected by the staff at David Reed Collegiate to address school improvement. Once these projects are done, staff members plan to reassess priorities and start some new projects. The principal sees them doing two or three projects a year, thus paying ongoing attention to school improvement.

Cally Junior High

Cally Junior High is located in a small Saskatchewan city and provides education for 480 grade 7 to 9 students. The major project that the 25-member staff is addressing this year is goals. The release of the new statement of goals of education in September was the initiating event.

The staff decided to analyze the school program by looking at how they were providing opportunities for their students to achieve the goals. It was decided that over a three-year period each goal area would be studied.

This year three committees are working. Each has taken a goal area to study. Brainstorming sessions have been held with the whole staff to articulate what the school is now doing to achieve the goals and what could be done to enhance student opportunities. Smaller committees are working behind the scenes collecting and collating data. The plan is to document what the school is now doing and to determine ways to achieve goals that are not being addressed.

The staff hopes to assess the total program with respect to each goal area and make revisions, deletions, or additions by the end of the three-year period. They feel this developmental approach will be the most effective way for them to address and begin implementing the new goals of education.

St. Catherine School

This year, the staff at St. Catherine School all belong to teaching teams. As a result of an inservice workshop last spring, more effective instruction has

become a major goal for the staff. They have focussed on using a variety of teaching strategies and each teacher is going to try to use two new strategies in the coming year.

In order to help teachers achieve this goal, a number of steps have been taken. Several school-based inservice sessions have been set up to study different teaching strategies. Each inservice session is designed to provide a theoretical presentation, a demonstration of the specific strategy, and time for practice and feedback. Two central office consultants who have received training on teaching strategies are assisting the staff. In addition, a set of video tapes is available for the teams to work with.

The 20-member staff has divided itself into five teaching teams in order to establish a support structure for teachers learning new strategies and developing different skills. Each team has four members and all members of a team study the same strategy so they can coach one another in the classroom. While two teachers work together, one of the other team members covers the coach's class. The members take turns as teacher, coach, supervisor, and spare. The four members share and discuss their successes and concerns.

The St. Catherine School staff is committed to learning about more effective instruction during this school year. All school-based inservice will be devoted to teaching strategy sessions. In addition, staff members have agreed to choose sessions on instruction whenever possible during other professional development activities such as conventions, institutes, and conferences. Ideas picked up are to be shared at the monthly staff meeting devoted to professional development.

Bainbridge School Division

A new K-12 Computer Literacy Program is being implemented in the Bainbridge School Division. As a result of increasing interest and pressure from both teachers and students, the superintendent agreed to establish a reference committee on computers. This committee included teachers, board members, administrators, central office staff, parents, and students.

After clarifying the goals and mandate of the reference group, several sub-committees were formed to work on hardware, software, program development, equipment and facilities, and professional development. One night a week was devoted to development and committee work, and the groups worked long and hard. At the end of five months, the Bainbridge School Division had a proposal for a K-12 Computer Program and a plan to implement it.

The school board approved the program and provided $2,500.00 for each school in the district. In addition, each school devoted a portion of its school budget to the project. Inservice sessions were held and a teacher in each school was designated to be trouble-shooter and ongoing coach.

The reference committee continues to meet. Its members are monitoring the implementation and dealing with obstacles. They plan to monitor the implementation for at least one year, and are determined the project will not become a passing fad.

Ryerson School

Over half of the students at Ryerson School are Indian or Metis. Most of them live on the Two Rivers Reserve. The principal was concerned with meeting the unique needs of her students, and in early October Sara Elliott made a trip out to meet with the band council. Her major purpose was to establish relations with the community of a major portion of her students.

Meetings and communications are now ongoing. The band council has become active in program decision-making and two of the programs in Ryerson School are the result of this school-community liaison.

All students at all grade levels participate in a Saulteaux Language Program. Each day teaching associates from the reserve assist in instructing students in the Saulteaux language. This brings the Saulteaux language and culture into the school and at the same time raises the awareness and understanding of other students.

A co-operative preschool program is an important second project at Ryerson school. The objective of the program is to provide readiness experiences for children who need them. It provides a transition for some children from home to school and gives them a chance to develop skills to help them have a successful school experience.

In the preschool program, parents and teachers are partners. Parents spend time assisting in the program and are encouraged to participate at an early stage in their child's education. The program provides an opportunity for the teachers and other parents to better understand the local Saulteaux people, their culture, and the need for relevant programs and instruction. It helps to bridge the gap between the cultures.

Conrad Elementary

A staff meeting has just taken place at Conrad Elementary. Some teachers are gathering their things to leave, some have formed a group to pursue an idea that was brought up during the meeting. Other teachers are chatting and making arrangements to follow up on tasks for Parents' Night which is to take place a month from now.

The staff at Conrad Elementary is in the first year of a five-year project to improve teaching and learning at their school. After a couple of study sessions on *Directions*, the group decided to develop a long-term plan to make some changes at Conrad School. After deciding they couldn't do everything at once, they agreed to proceed one step at a time and to involve parents and students.

One teacher suggested choosing a theme for a year and then developing a number of projects related to that theme. Everyone agreed this would provide a focus. Although many things might be going on at the same time and everyone might be working on different things, staff members would all be working toward the same purpose. The staff selected five themes for the next five years. This year the theme is goals of education. Next year school environment will be the focus. Programs, instruction, and school-community relations will be the themes for years three, four, and five.

Several plans around goals of education are now in the works. The teachers have studied the provincial goals statement released in September, 1984 and clarified among themselves the nine categories and the specific goal statements. Each teacher is going to do some kind of goals activity with his or her students. In this way, students will get to express their ideas on what school should be.

Goal setting is to be a priority in the five-year plan and staff members have planned a workshop on that topic. Eventually, they hope to teach all students how to set goals for their learning and behavior in the school.

Parents are being asked to react and respond to the goals. Their views will then be displayed in a newsletter. The Parents' Night that has been planned is another means of involving parents. Each classroom will be designated as a goal area and school projects that provide opportunities for students to work toward each goal will be displayed. It is hoped that these opportunities will get parents problem-solving and sharing ideas for achieving the goals.

The target for the end of this year is to have a set of goals for Conrad School. The teachers and principal are determined to decide on some directions and begin making some concrete decisions about their own school.

Pine Lake School

Local materials development is the project receiving attention this year at Pine Lake School, located in a small community in Northern Saskatchewan. The project was initiated by a group of teachers concerned about the relevancy of curriculum materials for their students. A proposal was put forward to the principal and other teachers that materials containing references to life in Northern Saskatchewan be collected and developed by the school staff.

As a first step, letters were written to all other schools in Northern Saskatchewan requesting information about resources and programs which had already been developed by teachers. The staff was very interested in having materials as soon as possible and did not want to "reinvent the wheel."

A second step in the project was for teachers to brainstorm ideas for the kinds of material they felt would be most valuable. They compiled an outline of topics and hope to eventually develop units so that each grade level and each subject area is using relevant materials.

The staff at Pine Lake School sees this as a big project, but one which is vital. They have arranged for a resource person to help them get organized and co-ordinate their professional development days, three of which have been set aside for this project. Staff members are planning to approach the school board for assistance in duplicating and distributing their materials so other schools can benefit from their work. They hope other staffs will become interested, and a Northern Saskatchewan materials network can be established.

Todd School

The most immediate program concern of teachers at Todd School is spelling. In the past, different teachers taught spelling in different ways. Some had a program and were using a textbook. Some taught spelling as part of language arts. Others simply used a spelling list made up of words from all subject areas and gave a test each Friday. Spelling was not being consistently addressed in the school.

All teachers are now participating in the implementation of a new spelling program. After discussing spelling at several staff meetings, they took a number of steps. First, a language arts resource person from a neighbouring school division spent a day with the staff reviewing the recent research on spelling instruction and guiding them through a program evaluation procedure. Overviews of five different spelling programs were presented.

The staff then spent the next month reviewing and evaluating each of the programs according to the criteria and procedures discussed with the resource person at the spelling workshop. One program was chosen and a second professional development day was set up for teachers to become acquainted with the selected program. The publishing company provided the resource person to conduct the inservice. At the end of the day the staff was not

only familiar with the program and materials, but had a plan for implementation.

The teachers tried some lessons with their classes last May and June to get a feel for the program and give it a trial run. In September, half a day was devoted to questions, answers, and planning for implementation of the new program.

Standardized spelling tests were administered to begin the program. The staff agreed to schedule 90 minutes a week for spelling. Once a month, time is allotted at a staff meeting for sharing and problem-solving. A full evaluation will take place at the end of this school year to assess the program. Modifications and revisions will be made for the following year.

Key Components of School Improvement

The school improvement projects described in these scenarios are not all the same. Some of the schools are concerned with implementing new programs, some are concerned with interpersonal relationships, some are concerned with instruction. The projects in the schools were not all initiated at the same level. Some depend on significant extra funding for implementation, some don't. What is it, then, that makes the school improvement efforts described in the scenarios successful?

There are nine key elements which make school improvement work. Not all of them are present in all projects. Each of the scenarios, however, describes a number of the elements which can be seen as the key components of school improvement. These components are summarized in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Key Components of School Improvement

School-Based Change: The school level is the point at which most effective and long lasting change takes place.

Long-Term Planning: School improvement projects should be part of a long-term plan based on school needs and goals.

Collaborative Decision-Making: Those affected by proposed changes need to be involved in decision-making and planning.

Problem-Solving Approach: A problem-solving approach is most effective for school improvement. Staffs need to assume an evaluative stance, explore alternatives, make plans, and act on them.

Effective Inservice Education: Teachers need training to learn new skills and behaviors. Effective inservice education is cruical to school improvement.

Adequate Support and Resources: People in schools need resources and many kinds of support to engage in school improvement. Time, technical expertise, materials, and respect are vital.

Regular Communication: Regular and systematic communication between teachers and with parents, the central office, and the board to keep everyone informed builds and sustains commitment and support.

Systematic Evaluation: Indicators of success need to be identified so projects can be monitored and evaluated. Evaluation should lead to refinements and new projects.

Strong Leadership: Someone with strong leadership skills needs to initiate school improvement and guide the staff in the improvement process.

CHAPTER 2: Guidelines for School Improvement

During the seventies and eighties, change in schools has been a major theme in educational research. Literature has accumulated on such topics as effective leadership, effective teaching, and effective schools. In addition, a great deal has been discovered about how adults learn and the factors that contribute to effective inservice education. The key components of school improvement have been identified by researchers studying the characteristics of successful change projects. The components identified in Figure 1 can be used as guidelines when planning for school improvement.

School-Based Change

Change that is planned and carried out at the school level rather than the district or provincial level is most effective and long lasting. The collective effort of a group of teachers who are supported by the surrounding educational community can have a true impact on the education provided for a specific group of students.

When a cohesive group addresses problems and makes decisions, commitment and ownership are developed and action, improvement, and change are more likely to occur. School improvement projects are most effective when they emerge from the school and its people.

School improvement projects are most effective when they emerge from the school and its program.

Long-Term Planning

Change does not occur as the result of a single event. It entails commitment to long-term planning based on clear goals. Isolated events often consume energy and resources and sometimes result in conflict, dissention, and projects that are never completed. Change projects need to be part of a larger plan to refine existing practices for the continued and ongoing improvement of the school.

Part of the planning process is establishing clear goals shared by those who are involved in the proposed innovation. These people need to "see" the vision they are collectively striving to achieve. Participation in goal setting is crucial to success.

Another important aspect of planning is the establishment of procedures for problem-solving, decision-making, conflict resolution, goal setting, reporting, and communication. Unclear procedures create misunderstandings and confusion.

Collaborative Decision-Making

People who are affected by decisions need to be part of the planning and decision-making process. Increased rates of innovation and the successful implementation of change are associated with teacher autonomy and participation.

Staff involvement is a change strategy which builds ownership and commitment. A partnership approach secures the co-operation of others and motivates them to act. Involvement must begin early with shared decision-making in the establishment of goals, roles, and procedures. Early involvement ensures that responsibility for follow-through and action is shared and that everyone is clear about procedures and priorities. High teacher involvement in problem-solving related to programs, evaluation, problem identification, solutions, and school-wide decisions is associated with teachers having a sense of effectiveness and satisfaction.

Involvement must begin early with shared decision-making in the establishment of goals, roles, and procedures.

Problem-Solving Approach

Staffs need to adopt an inquiry attitude and an evaluative stance related to the continual review and renewal of their schools. This problem-solving approach to school improvement is most effective. A staff that can problem-solve and plan together gets consensus on objectives, goals, roles, and expectations. They explore alternatives and plan for action. The staff that becomes a problem-solving unit is most likely to bring about change and build a more effective learning environment.

Effective Inservice Education

Staff development is crucial to school improvement. Teachers need training and time to change their teaching practices. Growth and development is incremental and inservice education activities need to be provided during all stages of a change project.

Appropriate training must be available as needs arise. Lack of time given to inservice is a barrier to success during implementation of new programs and practices.

Different kinds of activities are required at different stages of a project. Depending on the purpose, inservice activity could take many forms: an awareness presentation that provides an overview or orientation, a knowledge session, skill development workshops, classroom and school visits, opportunities to plan strategies, practice and observation trials, coaching, and problem-solving and sharing sessions. All are important at appropriate times.

Adequate Resources and Support

Most projects that result in change take three to four years. A strong support system, including both human and material resources, is necessary for effective implementation of an innovation. Time, money, and people need to be allocated for the duration of the implementation. Information and materials specific to the innovation or opportunities to create and adapt materials are essential. Access to consultants and technical expertise is equally important. Funding for materials and technical assistance is vital.

For school staffs to truly effect change, adequate blocks of time must be provided throughout the school year for activities such as practicing a new technique, follow-up coaching, sharing of ideas and concerns, and planning. The amount of time spent by participants and consultants in interaction around a change project influences its success.

Supportive administrative arrangements related to space and schedules can also be key. External support from both the central office and the community increases the chances of success and should be considered in planning for change. The greater the amount and visibility of support, the greater the positive impact on the change effort.

A strong support system, including both human and material resources, is necessary for effective implementation of an innovation.

Regular Communication

Informal and formal systems of communication need to be established as opportunities for sharing and discussion are essential. Staff meetings should be regular and frequent. They should be carefully planned to encourage the exchange of ideas, strategies, and resources. Staff meetings should also be used for problem-solving and planning, and

should be seen as opportunities for staff development and inservice education. Newsletters, display areas, bulletin boards, and daily news updates also provide avenues for regular and frequent sharing of information, concerns, and decisions.

Systematic Evaluation

Leaders striving for improvement know their teachers, students, facilities, and community as well as the range and variety of resources available to the school. They constantly monitor the school by collecting information from a variety of sources, both formal and informal, and use the information to plan and move the school toward improvement of instruction.

Assessment, evaluation, and supervision systems need to be in place as part of the planning process. Clear procedures for assessing needs and surveying staff and students ensure that decision-making is based on the priorities of those involved.

When goals are set, so too are indicators against which to measure success. Each school improvement project should be monitored and assessed at check points so that adjustments and modifications can be made along the way. Projects should also be evaluated upon completion. Evaluation leads to further decision-making about school improvements.

Effective leaders see the school as a whole and advocate a vision for a better school.

Strong Leadership

Leaders play a particularly crucial role when it comes to implementing changes. Effective leaders see the school as a whole and advocate a vision for a better school. They facilitate improvement by initiating change projects, supporting and encouraging people, assessing needs, and providing resources to get things done.

A number of behaviors and activities which support change efforts are characteristic of leaders successful in effecting improvements. Effective leaders can provide support through the following actions:

- creating and maintaining an environment that encourages risktaking, innovation, and creativity
- establishing clear procedures and channels of communication
- organizing in order to make full use of human and material resources

- linking staff members with consultants, other teachers, and resource personnel
- giving recognition to staff and students for their accomplishments
- co-ordinating effective staff development programs related to change efforts.

Effective leaders see themselves as members of a team. They secure teacher involvement by establishing planning, decision-making, and evaluation structures which provide for participation. They are able to engage staff, students, and parents in working together productively to improve the school.

Summary

Several components are key to school improvement and, taken together, create a "climate" where change can occur. Characteristics which describe this climate include openness, enthusiasm, positive attitudes, a spirit of inquiry, willingness of those involved to support each other, innovativeness, creativity, and a mechanism for solving problems.

In schools with this climate for change, goals and activities are evaluated on a regular basis and the search for alternatives is continuous. Problem-solving occurs in response to concerns and conflicts. Teachers support each other in learning and implementing new ideas by assisting and encouraging. Creativity and innovation are recognized and rewarded, and teachers are challenged to take risks and try new things.

All these components are key to the school improvement process which is outlined in the next chapter.

In schools with a climate for change, goals and activities are evaluated on a regular basis and the search for alternatives is continuous.

CHAPTER 3: The School Improvement Process

The school improvement process described here is a co-operative problem-solving process. It provides a structure that a staff can follow to enhance working and learning conditions in their school. There are a number of phases in the process and several steps within each phase. Many tasks and activities must be undertaken. The process is complex and takes time . . . but it works.

An Overview

The school improvement process can be separated into eight phases. Figure 2 provides an overview of the process. All phases and the associated activities are important when attempting to implement change in some aspect of school life.

The first five phases of the school improvement process involve activities related to planning. Ensuring that goals are set based on the collection of data, that options are considered and evaluated, and that a detailed plan is developed are key to implementing an innovation in the school. Spending the time on careful planning and preparation for change is imperative.

Spending time on careful planning and preparation for change is imperative.

Implementation involves a number of activities related to actually establishing new programs and practices in the classroom. Training opportunities and time for problem-solving and sharing are necessary during implementation.

Monitoring and evaluation are essential tasks. Check points must be set up to monitor progress and evaluate success. Finally, a number of tasks are part of the follow-up phase which is necessary to sustain and maintain a new program or practice if it is to have long-lasting effect.

Figure 2: Phases in the School Improvement Process

Getting Started

Reviewing the School

Goal Setting

Seeking Solutions: Options and Decisions

Developing Action Plans

Implementation

Monitoring and Evaluation

Follow-Up

Getting Started

The first thing a staff needs to do is learn about the school improvement process. Studying the stages and steps in a change project will help the staff understand the goals, roles, procedures, strategies, and time involved in school improvement. This understanding precedes commitment and is an important first step.

The first thing a staff needs to do is learn about the school improvement process.

There are many ways to learn about the school improvement process and a staff might choose to use several. A consultant could be invited to provide an overview. Staff members could obtain a number of articles and key references that are available on the process and a variety of related topics. One staff member could attend an inservice session and then share the information. A school-based workshop on problem-solving could be held. A film or video tape on school improvement could be reviewed.

After learning about school improvement, the staff must make a commitment to use a problem-solving process for the purpose of improving the functioning of the school.

Reviewing the School

A staff needs to examine and assess current practices in the school.

In order to plan for improvement, a staff needs to examine and assess current practices in the school. This school review is important for three reasons:

- it is a way to identify strengths as well as areas in need of improvement
- it provides a basis for decision-making and subsequent planning
- it provides a data base for measurement and evaluation.

Reviewing the school involves three activities or tasks: collecting data (getting the facts), summarizing the data, and reporting the results. A school review can be informal and general, or formal, comprehensive, and quite specific. The distinction is related to the extent of the data collection process.

Data Collection

A number of systems and procedures for collecting and summarizing data have been developed by different schools and school divisions engaged in school improvement. An informal, simple review might involve a staff identifying problems of a general nature at a meeting. Staff members could simply brainstorm major problems they have with current conditions and practices in the school. They could also make a list of ways to improve current procedures. This would result in a list of possible areas for improvement.

Alternatively, the staff could identify things they like about the school and things they would like to change. Or the staff could identify what they think are the strengths and weaknesses of their school.

A more formal review employs the use of surveys and interviews. Students, teachers, and parents could be asked for their opinions. In addition, test scores could be compiled, and attendance records and other statistical information examined. A formal review can be comprehensive or can focus on a specific aspect of school life.

Sometimes an informal general review is conducted to isolate an area that can be more thoroughly investigated through a formal process. An informal review that uses a simpler data collection method is best when school improvement is new to a staff. In such a case, the staff needs to pick a topic, get started, and work through the process. If a formal

review is conducted for a first project, a staff can get bogged down and lose interest.

Summarizing and Reporting the Results

After facts have been collected, the findings need to be analyzed and summarized so the staff can work with them. Lists, charts, graphs, and diagrams are appropriate for displaying the summaries. Brief narrative statements concerning the most important results can also be useful.

The review process helps the staff establish a focus for school improvement.

Often a profile of the school is charted following a comprehensive data collection process. A profile can focus on one area or provide an overall picture of current operating procedures in the school.

The summary of results are then shared or presented to the staff. Discussion and consultation follow the presentation and should lead to the identification of strengths and weaknesses. This review process helps the staff establish a focus for school improvement projects.

Goal Setting

Assessing strengths and weaknesses follows from the school review phase. Assessing the school's current practices accomplishes two objectives. First, it identifies positive things which staff and students can continue to pursue. Second, it identifies a variety of areas where there is room for improvement. All these areas can eventually become goals in a plan for improvement.

Establishing a goal or set of goals is perhaps the most important task in the entire process. Goals give a staff vision and purpose. Goals provide a focus and form the basis for decision-making during all subsequent steps.

Establishing a goal or set of goals is perhaps the most important task in the entire process.

Lack of direction is a major barrier to change in schools. It results in confusion, conflict, and the dividing of a staff's energy among many projects which have limited support, move slowly, and are often not completed.

There are a number of ways to establish goals. In some cases, the list of weaknesses or areas identified for improvement become the goals. Most of the time, though, the list is analyzed and items are grouped into goal areas. This reduces the number of goals and provides a focus for the staff.

A list of topics or goal areas, however, is not sufficient. The list must be made into specific goal statements. Concrete actions related to the topics must be identified.

Once a list of goals has been established, priorities can be set. It is recommended that staffs select only one or two goals initially and concentrate on achieving those, particularly if the problem-solving process is an innovation in itself. A group of people engaged in learning a new process expend a great deal of energy on the process and cannot accommodate a lot of new information or changes at the same time.

Seeking Solutions: Options and Decisions

Staffs need to consider a variety of solutions.

Seeking solutions once goals have been established is the next phase of the school improvement process. During this phase, a staff generates possible solutions, searches for options, makes judgments, and decides on a solution. Brainstorming is a useful procedure when beginning the search. When this technique is used, everyone on the staff becomes involved in making suggestions for dealing with a problem and finding solutions.

Staffs need to consider a variety of solutions. Often, professional development experiences can be arranged for staffs to learn about the possibilities or about a specific solution they are interested in pursuing. There are many options for professional development activities, including the following:

- viewing films or video tapes
- reading articles and books
- attending workshops
- arranging problem-solving and planning sessions
- analyzing current curriculums
- evaluating new programs
- arranging presentations
- participating in sharing sessions
- taking courses, classes, and seminars
- having a consultant work with teachers
- observing in other classrooms
- visiting other schools.

Once all ideas are exhausted, criteria need to be established for judging the suggestions. Criteria such as appropriateness, cost, time, and availability of equipment, facilities, and resource people are often used to analyze each suggestion. Sometimes a staff goes through a process of identifying the pros and cons or consequences and implications of each solution. Some means of analysis must be used in the selection of a solution or series of solutions.

Planning for Action

Often people pursue the school improvement process to the point of choosing a solution but end up disappointed because no action, no change, and no improvement follow. A clear and agreed upon plan of action is necessary to prevent this disappointment.

A plan of action should outline a schedule of activities and tasks, designate roles and responsibilities, and establish time lines. Some of the tasks which need to be considered include arranging for training, allocating or securing funding, and obtaining appropriate materials. In addition, there needs to be a strategy for communicating with parents, central office personnel, and board members to create awareness and build support. Another important part of planning is considering how success of the project will be determined.

A plan of action should outline a schedule of activities and tasks, designate roles and responsibilities, and establish time lines.

Planning can be simple, or very comprehensive and complex. A simple plan may identify an objective, then outline *what* tasks are to be done, *how* they will be done, *who* is responsible, and *when* the tasks will be completed. Figure 3 displays a simple planning guide.

Sometimes it is appropriate and most useful to break into working committees. Several small groups can work on parts of a larger project or on different projects. Each group sets objectives and develops a plan for action. The working committees research, check resources, collect data, compile options, summarize findings, and perform other background tasks. They essentially do the ground work and prepare materials to aid future decision-making and action. Plans, intentions, and proposals are brought to the whole staff, where decisions are made. This approach enables a staff to accomplish more and use meeting time more efficiently.

Figure 3: Planning Guide

TOPIC: _____

OBJECTIVE: _____

_____

_____

_____

TASKS:
-
-
-

WHO:
- **Co-ordinator**
- **Committee Members**

COMPLETION DATE: _____

Sometimes working committees are formed at the school review stage to collect data if a formal and comprehensive school review is being conducted. Each committee assumes responsibility for collecting and compiling data on some aspect of the school's functioning. This enables a staff to cover more ground in a shorter period of time.

Implementation

Training of some kind is almost always the first step in the implementation phase. Educators generally need information, a chance to practice new skills and strategies, and time to plan for implementing an innovation into current classroom practice.

Problem-solving and sharing sessions need to be conducted on a regular basis.

When teachers first implement a new program or practice, they need support and coaching. In addition, a person outside the classroom needs to deal with the multitude of problems and administrative concerns which arise during implementation. Problem-solving and sharing sessions need to be conducted on a regular basis. Arrangements for follow-up inservice sessions also need to be made.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring refers to ongoing assessment during a project. Keeping track of a project and checking progress are monitoring tasks. Observation, questionnaires, informal chats, problem-solving and sharing sessions, and brief progress reports can all be used to monitor a project.

Often, an innovation is adapted to fit the specific situation rather than being adopted completely in its original form. At times, decisions are made midway through a project to adjust, modify, revise, or terminate plans. One purpose of monitoring is to assess this adaptation process. Monitoring is a kind of formative evaluation that serves to provide data for decision-making so continual adjustments and improvements can be made.

Some system for keeping track of progress needs to be established.

Evaluation of both the implementation process and the degree of change achieved also needs to occur at the completion of a project. In conducting this summative evaluation, it is most useful to refer back to the school review done in the planning phase. Staffs can look at where they were and where they are, then reassess where they want to go.

Some system for keeping track of progress needs to be established. It is a good idea to include strategies for monitoring and evaluation in the action plan.

Follow-Up

Follow-up is an often neglected but essential phase of any change project. There are a number of tasks that are necessary to sustain and maintain a new program or practice. Follow-up and refresher sessions need to be conducted so the innovation remains a priority and becomes a part of the regular activities of the school. New and reassigned staff members need to be trained. If they are not, the innovation will die as the original people are transferred or leave.

In addition, the curriculum or practice must be incorporated into school guidelines and policy. New materials and supplies need to be routinely purchased. The innovation needs to be established as a regular budget item to ensure that ongoing support and resources will be available.

The innovation needs to be established as a regular budget item to ensure that ongoing support and resources will be available.

Summary

The school improvement process involves many tasks and activities. The phases and steps are summarized in Figure 4.

Figure 4: Checklist of Activities in a School Improvement Project

Getting Started

____ learn about the process

____ make a commitment to engage in school improvement

Reviewing the School

____ collect data

____ summarize the results

____ report and discuss the results

Goal Setting

____ assess strengths and weaknesses

____ establish goals

____ set priorities

Seeking Solutions: Options and Decisions

____ consider options

____ analyze choices

____ select solution(s)

Planning for Action

____ develop an action plan

____ establish working committees

____ outline a system for monitoring and evaluation

Implementation

___ conduct initial training

____ provide for coaching

____ establish a way to deal with administrative concerns

____ hold problem-solving and sharing sessions

____ plan and conduct follow-up inservice sessions

Monitoring and Evaluation

____ monitor the project

____ evaluate the project

____ evaluate the implementation process

Follow-Up

____ train new or reassigned staff

____ provide continuing inservice sessions

____ incorporate the program into curriculum guidelines

____ routinely purchase new materials and supplies

____ establish the innovation as a regular budget item

Some final tips to consider when initiating a school improvement project are outlined below:

- Start small. Don't try too many things at once.
- Develop incrementally. Take one step at a time. Refine practices rather than delete and replace.
- Celebrate successes. Be positive. Look for things that are going well and celebrate small steps along the way. Don't expect overnight and instant change.
- Capitalize on learning experiences. Regard mistakes as chances to learn. Describe what happened, express how you feel about it, assess the learning, and alter the plan.
- Support each other. Give recognition where it is due. A small amount of encouragement goes a long way. Problem-solve rather than complain when barriers or obstacles surface.
- Laugh and have fun.

CHAPTER 4: Implications

In order to engage successfully in school improvement, most schools require support. Vigorous leadership is needed at all levels to ensure the existence of that support. Strong leadership involves the following supportive actions:

- keeping education in the public eye
- making improvement a priority
- developing policies which enable schools to engage in improvement efforts
- creating or collecting a pool of successful practices
- highlighting and rewarding successes
- providing support networks
- expanding the knowledge base and access to it
- providing technical assistance to help people work at various tasks
- providing resources and incentives
- ensuring inservice education and training opportunities.

School improvement involves a complex network of people working together and providing support for one another. No level of the system can divorce itself from the process. The implications for educators and educational organizations are diverse and far-reaching.

Vigorous leadership is needed at all levels to ensure support for school improvement.

Education and Public Relations

Public interest in education has been high in the past few years. People are now talking about the need for change and are planning improvements. Advisory committees have been formed, some local reviews have been undertaken, long-term plans are being considered. Education is very much in the public eye.

In order for these current actions to influence the education offered in schools, it is essential that education remain in the public eye. Decision-making, policy development, public statements, and resource allocations must all reflect a recognition that education is a priority. Schools must receive the message that developing a plan and engaging in school improvement is an immediate expectation.

Policy needs to provide structures and frameworks for local decision-making, but at the same time allow for flexibility so educators can respond to local needs.

Enabling Policies and Guidelines

Policies developed at the provincial level must be enabling rather than restrictive. They need to provide structures and frameworks for local decision-making, but at the same time allow for flexibility so educators can respond to local needs. Such policies should encourage school divisions to establish locally developed plans for school improvement. In essence, provincial policy needs to provide parameters and guidelines rather than restrictive criteria.

This enabling concept also applies to guidelines which are developed at either the central office or regional level. Each school in the system has a unique belief structure, value system, and governance system. Policies that demand uniformity from school to school are likely to destroy these important elements.

If schools are to function efficiently, administrative difficulties must be solved at levels other than the school level. This enables people in schools to concentrate on teaching. Administrators, central office personnel, trustees, and provincial officials can make school improvement easier by taking care of procedural and policy matters and protecting school improvement projects.

Development and Dissemination

When schools begin working on improvement efforts, they reach out for solutions and help of different kinds. As school improvement projects increase, so too will the need for a clearing house of ideas and resources.

A clearing house can provide two major services. The first includes the creation or collection of a pool of successful practices that can be made available to schools on a request basis. Many effective programs and instructional practices are available for dissemination to schools. The clearing house can provide information to support schools in their endeavours.

The educational community now has a rich research base that can be tapped to design successful school improvement strategies.

Secondly, a clearing house can help schools link theory or research to concrete classroom practice. The education community now has a rich research base that can be tapped to design successful school improvement strategies. A centrally located organization can synthesize research and translate findings and results into guidelines for educational practitioners on a continuing basis.

While a clearing house for disseminating information is appropriate at several levels, it operates most effectively at a provincial level. Educators at this level are in the best position to see the whole picture and to survey alternatives from a variety of sources.

Although a clearing house addresses the problem of dissemination, developmental efforts are required on an ongoing basis. At times, provincial thrusts on specific areas of school improvement may be required. At other times, it may be appropriate for the Department of Education to develop materials or sponsor inservice education programs. Continued support related to new programs is imperative.

Networking

Highlighting and rewarding successes encourages school improvement. It is important to give recognition to those who have implemented a program or strategy which makes their school a better place to be. This type of support forms the foundation for a networking system.

The concept of a provincial networking structure is related to the clearing house concept previously addressed. Linking one school with another that has had experience with the same problem is often the most helpful assistance that can be given.

Many innovative and creative projects are already underway in our schools. Once school improvement is recognized as a priority, there will be many more experiences to draw upon. A provincial network which shares knowledge of innovations occurring around the province and elsewhere could contribute significantly to school improvement in Saskatchewan.

Incentives, Support, and Resources

While clear priorities, enabling policies, and development and networking services will aid schools in improving their operations, incentives and other kinds of assistance are necessary to encourage and sustain change efforts. Improvements cannot take place without support and resources.

Improving schools is probably going to cost money. New funds may be necessary to provide an incentive to get innovations started. But providing new funds is only one way to assist educators. Reallocation of present funds and people is another answer to the problem of finding the resources necessary to support school improvement. Current allocations of people, time, and money should be examined. With creative and efficient use of resources, school improvement can be relatively inexpensive.

Technical Assistance

Technical assistance is another form of support that is crucial to school improvement. People need asistance when learning new skills and strategies to solve problems and to change things in their schools. Often, a facilitator is needed to help staff work through the school improvement process. A network among principals may need to be established. Teachers will require coaching. Administrators may need ideas on how to promote collaborative planning and decision-making. Staffs will need to be linked with human and material resources to help them in their school improvement projects. All of these involve technical assistance and someone needs to provide this kind of support.

Improvements can not take place without support and resources.

There are a number of ways of providing technical assistance, including the following: establishing administrator training academies and internships which focus on the development of management skills; conducting teacher institutes on effective teaching and effective schools; encouraging teachers to have long-term plans for professional development; providing linkers or facilitators to help school staffs learn process skills; and supporting principals' networks where educational leaders share and problem-solve together.

People need assistance when learning new skills and strategies to solve problems and change things in their schools.

Many schools will need extensive technical assistance in order to be successful in implementing school improvement projects. There is a need for a commitment by both provincial organizations and school districts to provide assistance or to function as "linkers" and "change agents."

Attitudes and Roles

There are many roles to be played in a school improvement process. Figure 5 presents an overview of these roles. One person can play many of the roles; all are important to success.

School improvement requires that those involved be prepared to adopt certain attitudes and change roles when the need is apparent. The underlying beliefs that are embodied in what is known about effective change impacts all those involved in education. There are responsibilities for policy makers, principals, teachers, students, central office personnel, and external consultants. In addition, someone must assume the key role of local facilitator.

Policy Makers

School improvement involves changes in the roles of provincial educational organizations, central office administrators within school districts, and boards of education. Presently, the functions of these agencies are primarily regulatory. They can facilitate school improvement by providing technical assistance to help teachers and schools develop the capacity to change.

Figure 5: Roles in School Improvement

Overseer of the System

This person is aware of what is happening in the school at all times. He or she sees the school as a whole rather than a collection of classrooms.

Linker

This person links people, ideas, and resources within and outside the school.

Housekeeper

This person is responsible for paper work, accounting, reporting, organizing, recording, and keeping files.

Broker

This person "wheels and deals" for the school and the project. A broker knows the skills and abilities of many people, and where to go for outside resources.

Cheerleader

This person cheers others on by being supportive and encouraging.

Problem-solver

This person runs interference by solving administrative and procedural problems.

Trainer

This person conducts inservice education sessions. He or she is a skilled presenter and understands adult learners.

Coach

This person encourages the staff to keep working. He or she gives guidance, support, and pep talks.

Public Relations Director

This person takes charge of communicating information both inside and outside the school. Keeping people informed is a major task.

Co-ordinator

This person keeps the materials, facilities, people, and flow of information organized. He or she is in charge of efficiency.

Chairperson

This person knows how to run an effective meeting. Much of the school improvement process occurs at meetings or work sessions and a good chairperson is essential.

Communications Expert

This person is skilled at getting people to work together in spite of problems and differing perspectives. He or she is sensitive to the feelings of others.

Policy makers need to bridge the gap between giving direction and supporting autonomy.

School improvement requires a more decentralized approach to some educational decision-making. Mandating change will not work. Collaborative decision-making among the various parties involved and among all levels is necessary to effect change. A school staff needs to work with the immediate community in establishing the educational priorities for its students. Policy makers need to bridge the gap between giving direction and supporting autonomy.

Policy makers need to keep the mission of school improvement clear and hold realistic expectations for what can be done. The Department of Education, the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation, the Saskatchewan School Trustees Association, and boards of education must work together to encourage the educators in our schools to be innovative and creative.

Principals

The principal is an important player in the school improvement process. Without the principal's active support and endorsement, implementation of a project is difficult. When a principal actively works against an effort in a school, the chances of success are slim.

Principals can provide assertive leadership in the initiation and support of change. This leadership includes the carrying out of a number of tasks:

- participating in the identification of needs and solutions
- helping clarify priorities
- setting and clarifying expectations
- planning how the required training, support, and rearrangements will be integrated into the ongoing life of the school
- supporting and encouraging teachers, and coaching them as they learn new programs and practices
- securing resources and linking teachers with consultants
- monitoring improvement projects
- communicating with parents, the central office, and external consultants
- publicly advocating the school's improvement projects.

The principal sets the tone and affects staff morale. He or she can make or break any improvement effort.

Teachers

Teachers are at the core of any improvement effort. They have the job of actually implementing the new program or practice and their actions determine whether improvements actually occur in working conditions and learner outcomes. Teachers are the people who are in a position to change schools.

Teachers are the core of any improvement effort.

In order to effect school improvement, teachers need to change their perception of their role. They must see themselves as participants in decision-making about changes in the school. They must be prepared to take responsibility for things that go on in the school and not wait for direction from another level.

In addition, teachers must learn to view teaching as a practice to be studied, evaluated, and improved. This will lead teachers to pursue further skills, new knowledge, and outside help.

In addition to becoming more active in activities at the school level, teachers must be committed to change in the classroom. Preparing the students for change is a necessary part of the teacher's role in the school improvement process. A teacher must be aware that a culture exists in the classroom and some "deprogramming" may have to occur before new approaches are introduced.

Students

The introduction of an innovation often causes problems for students. The realization that the regular pattern of instruction or classroom program is changing can cause disorientation and anxiety. Students need to know what the change is about and exactly what new skills and behaviors are required. Negotiation is required between teacher and students about new roles and the requirements in a new learning environment. Depending on the innovation, it may be appropriate to involve students in problem-solving and decision-making.

Students need to know what the change is about and exactly what new skills and behaviors are required.

Central Office Staff

School improvement requires significant support from the central office. A number of actions on the part of central office administrators can ensure that change occurs and is long lasting. A central office person should perform the following tasks:

- provide ongoing direction, impetus, incentives, and rewards
- provide local resources or obtain external resources
- authorize the rearrangement of schedules, facilities, and staff assignments
- see that improvement remains a high priority in the face of stresses and strains
- provide ongoing knowledge and technical assistance
- give continuous and visible attention to the improvement effort.

If a person is unavailable to perform these essential tasks, consultant staff may need to be hired or reassigned.

The central office needs to provide a supportive climate in which school administrators are encouraged to innovate and try new behaviors. Reinforcement and promotion of the status quo will not encourage improvement.

In order for school level change to be effective, central office staff must advocate school improvement. The best advocates are those who stay with projects rather than turning quickly to other projects and prematurely handing responsibilities over to the school. The central office can maintain an innovation by writing the practices into the school curricula and standard operating procedures, and making the necessary materials and staff regular budget items.

External Consultants

School improvement requires significant support from the central office.

External consultants are needed to conduct initial and follow-up training. They are key to providing teachers with knowledge, skills, and tools to implement a new program or practice.

Teacher trainers have proven to be the most effective external consultants. It helps if they are local or close to the school. They can then be on hand to provide coaching and follow-up assistance.

Local Facilitator

Every school improvement project needs a local co-ordinator or facilitator to orchestrate the process. This person is key to the successful implementation of change. The tasks that fall within the responsibility of this person include the following:

- assessing needs
- creating awareness
- co-ordinating planning
- building support and commitment
- training or arranging for the training of teachers
- securing and allocating resources
- linking needs with resources
- problem-solving and trouble-shooting
- providing coaching and technical assistance
- teaching others the skills of facilitation.

While the principal or a teacher can complete these tasks, someone from the central office is often in the best position to be the local facilitator. Central office staff usually have the resources, the expertise, and the "clout" to co-ordinate school improvement efforts. They can search for proven practices, narrow down choices, and help teachers select appropriate programs. They have the ability and time to observe many classrooms and can link people who are dealing with common problems. In addition, a central office person is in the position to extend a practice throughout the district should that be desirable.

Every school improvement project needs a local co-ordinator or facilitator to orchestrate the process.

The local facilitator must possess many important skills and characteristics:

- flexibility
- patience
- tact
- perseverance
- practicality
- ability to convince
- ability to listen
- communication skills
- organizational skills
- meeting and discussion skills.

The goal of the local facilitator is to help staffs to solve their problems. Part of that goal is to teach staffs the skills of facilitation. Once staffs have learned the necessary skills, the involvement of the facilitator decreases. Eventually, that person serves as a linker and resource person.

Summary

School improvement is a complex process and all those involved must appreciate the nature of the task. In addition, they must recognize the importance of the following:

- strong leadership within the school
- outside support and expertise
- time and resources
- diversity
- a change in perception of roles.

School improvement is a complex process.

It is clear that the concept of school improvement described in this booklet has implications for all those involved in education: educators, school divisions, boards of education, the Department of Education, consultants, students, and the educational organizations. Concerted effort by all is needed to implement school improvement projects.

Action at the Local Level

Everyone wants the best schools possible. If Saskatchewan had the best schools possible, all children would have appropriate learning environments. They would progress in a developmental manner, experience success, learn in a variety of ways, and develop a number of skills and abilities. Learning would be fun and achievement would be high. Schools would be exciting and productive places.

Most Saskatchewan schools are busy and active places. Some are innovative. Others are very creative. Some schools promote sports programs while others encourage the arts. All attend to the academics. There are many good things going on in our schools, but there is always room for improvement.

In its final report, *Directions*, the Curriculum and Instruction Review Committee outlined a number of changes designed to improve education in Saskatchewan. The changes advocated affect all areas of schooling: goals, evaluation procedures, leadership, decision-making, instruction, delivery mechanisms, inservice education, teacher education, and support services.

Realizing the changes advocated in *Directions* will require that all those in education become involved in the school improvement process. A variety of actions are needed, but initiatives at the local level will no doubt prove to be the most important and the most effective actions taken. Changes in teaching and learning ultimately happen in the school.

Teachers and principals are in the best position to influence the education of Saskatchewan students by changing what happens in their schools. Initiation and decision-making at the school level are most effective in ensuring that school improvement actually occurs.

Concerted effort by all is needed to implement school improvement projects.

All schools must take action. People in schools must assess their own programs and practices, set goals, and develop long-term plans for action. If school staffs are given the respect, technical assistance, resources, and time to carry out their plans, school improvement in Saskatchewan will become a reality.

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